

THEOSOPHICAL MANUALS

XVI

FROM CRYPT TO PRONAOIS

AN ESSAY ON THE RISE AND
FALL OF DOGMA

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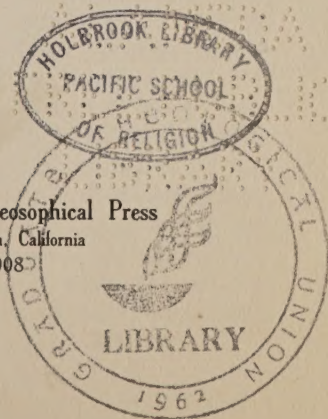
FROM CRYPT TO PRONAOS

AN ESSAY ON THE RISE AND FALL OF DOGMA

BY

(REV.) S. J. NEILL

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PREFACE

THE remarks under this head are intended to be introductory to each of the Manuals.

First, as to the spirit in which they are offered. These Manuals are not written in a controversial spirit, nor as an addition to the stock of theories awaiting public approval. The writers have no time to waste in arguing with people who do not wish to be convinced, or who ridicule everything which is new to their limited outlook. Their message is for those who desire to know — those who are seeking for something that will solve their doubts and remove their difficulties. For such, all that is needed is a clear exposition of the Theosophical teachings; for they will judge of the truth of a teaching by its power to answer the questions they ask. People realize, much more now than in the early days of the Theosophical Society, the value of Theosophy;

for the ever-increasing difficulties engendered by selfishness and materialism, by doubt and the multiplicity of theories, have created an urgent demand which it alone can satisfy.

Again, it is necessary to state clearly and emphatically the genuine teachings of Theosophy, as given by the Founder of the Theosophical Society, H. P. Blavatsky, and her successors, William Q. Judge and Katherine Tingley. For, as H. P. Blavatsky predicted, there are persons who have sought to pervert these teachings and turn them into a source of profit to themselves and their own selfish and ambitious schemes. The true teachings do not lend themselves to such purposes; their ideals are of the purest and most unselfish. Hence these persons have sought to promulgate under the name of Theosophy a perverted form of the teachings, from which Brotherliness and other pure motives are omitted, and which contains doctrines which H. P. Blavatsky showed to be maleficent and destructive. As these pseudo-Theosophists have gained a certain amount of notoriety by using the names of the Theosophical Society and its Leaders, it is necessary to warn the public against them

and their misrepresentations. Their teachings can easily be shown, by comparison, to be directly contrary to those of H. P. Blavatsky, whom they nevertheless profess to follow. Instead of having for their basis self-sacrifice, self-purification and the elevation of the human race, these teachings too often pander to ambition, vanity and curiosity. In many cases they are altogether ridiculous, and only calculated to make people laugh. Nevertheless, as these travesties have served to discredit the name of Theosophy and to keep earnest inquirers away from the truth, it is well that the public should know their nature and origin. They are the work of people who were at one time members of the Theosophical Society, but who did not find in it that food for their own personalities of which they were really in search. So they turned against their teachers in wounded pride and vanity, and started little societies of their own — with themselves at the head.

The writers of these Manuals have no personal grievance against any such calumniators. Inspired by a profound love of the sublime teachings of Theosophy, they have made it

their life-work to bring the benefits which they have thereby received within the reach of as many people as possible. And they feel that they will have the hearty sympathy and co-operation of the public in exposing folly and bringing the truth to light.

Theosophy strikes unfamiliar ground in modern civilization, because it does not come under any particular one of the familiar headings of Religion, Science, Philosophy, etc. into which our age has divided its speculative activities. It dates back to a period in the history of mankind when such distinctions did not exist, but there was one Gnosis or Knowledge embracing all. Religion and Science, as we have them today, are but imperfect growths springing from the remnants of that great ancient system, the Wisdom-Religion, which included all that we now know as religion and science, and much more. Hence Theosophy will not appeal to the same motives as religion and science. It will not offer any cheap and easy salvation or put a premium upon mental inactivity and spiritual selfishness. Neither can it accomodate itself to the rules laid down by various schools of modern thought as to

what constitutes proof and what does not. But it can and does appeal to the Reason. The truth of doctrines such as Theosophy maintains, can only be estimated by their ability to solve problems and by their harmony with other truths which we know to be true. But in addition to this we have the testimony of the ages, which has been too long neglected by modern scholarship, but which is now being revealed by archaeologists and scholars, as H. P. Blavatsky prophesied that it would in this century.

It may perhaps be as well also to remind those who would criticise, that the state of modern opinion is scarcely such as to warrant anybody in assuming the attitude of a judge. It would be quite proper for a Theosophist, instead of answering questions or attempting to give proofs, to demand that his questioners should first state their own case, and to be himself the questioner. The result would certainly show that Theosophy, to say the very least, stands on an equal footing with any other view, since there is no certain knowledge, no satisfying explanation, to be found anywhere.

Since the days when the wave of materialism swept over the world, obliterating the traces of the ancient Wisdom-Religion and replacing it by theological dogmatism our religions have had nothing to offer us in the way of a philosophical explanation of the laws of Being as revealed in Man and in Nature. Instead we have only had bare statements and dogmatic assertions. The higher nature of man is represented by such vague words as Spirit and Soul, which have little or no meaning for the majority. The laws of the universe are briefly summed up under the term "God," and all further consideration of them shut off. Then came a reaction against the dogmatism of religion, and man pinned his faith to knowledge gained by study and reflection, limiting his researches however to the outer world as presented by the senses, and fearing to trench upon the ground which dogmatic theology had rendered the field of so much contention. The result of this has been that neither in religions nor sciences, have we any teaching about the higher nature of man or the deeper mysteries of the universe. This is a field which is left entirely

unexplored, or is at best the subject of tentative and unguided conjectures.

Until, therefore, religious teachers have something definite, consistent, and satisfactory to offer, and until science can give us something better than mere confessions of nescience or impudent denials with regard to everything beyond its own domain, Theosophy can afford to assume the rôle of questioner rather than that of questioned, and does not *owe* anybody any explanations whatever. It is sufficient to state its tenets and let them vindicate themselves by their greater reasonableness; and any further explanation that may be offered is offered rather from goodwill than from any obligation.

Theosophy undertakes to explain that which other systems leave unexplained, and is, on its own special ground, without a competitor. It can issue a challenge to theology, science, and other modern systems, to surpass it in giving a rational explanation of the facts of life.

Again, there are some questions which it is beyond the reach of the human mind, in *its present stage of development*, to answer; and

it would scarcely be just to arraign Theosophy for not answering these.

Judgment should in all cases be preceded by careful study. There are always those who will impatiently rush to questions which a further study would have rendered unnecessary; and it is safe to say that the majority of "objections" raised to Theosophical teachings are such as could have been solved by the objector himself, had he been a genuine student. In the ordinary courses of education, scholars are required and are content, to accept provisionally many of the teacher's statements, in full confidence that further study will explain what in the beginning cannot be made clear. In the same spirit an earnest student of Theosophy will be wise enough to hold many of his difficulties in reserve, until, by further investigation, he has gained better acquaintance with his subject. In the case of those who are not willing to adopt these wise and patient methods of study, it may be reasonably questioned whether they are the more anxious to learn or to disprove.

Above all it is sought to make these Man-

uals such that they shall appeal to the heart and not *merely* to the head; that they shall be of practical service to the reader in the problems of his daily life, and not mere intellectual exercises. For there have been in past days books written by persons more distinguished for a certain grade of mental nimbleness than for heartfelt devotion to the cause of truth; and these have appealed only to those people who love intricate philosophical problems better than practical work. But as H. P. Blavatsky so frequently urged, the message of Theosophy is for suffering humanity; and the great Teachers, whose sole purpose is to bring to mankind the Light of Truth and the saving grace of real Brotherhood can have no interest in catering for the mental curiosity of merely a few well-to-do individuals. Even soulless men, said H. P. Blavatsky, can be brilliantly intellectual; but for those who are in earnest in their desire to reach the higher life intellectual fireworks alone will have little attraction. We intend, therefore, to keep the practical aspect of the teachings always to the front, and to show, as far as possible, that they are what

they claim to be — the gospel of a new hope and salvation for humanity.

These Booklets are not all the product of a single pen, but are written by different Students at the International Headquarters of the UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD AND THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY at Point Loma, California. Each writer has contributed his own quota to the series.

For further explanations on Theosophy generally, the reader is referred to the Book List published elsewhere in this volume and to the other Manuals of this series, which treat of Theosophy and the various Theosophical teachings.

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I

HUMAN VEILS OF TRUTH

RELIGION and dogma — are they both necessary to us? Are they in the Grand Design of things, as are spirit and matter, substance and form? And if so, what should be their relation, or proportion to each other? Some philosophers have thought that “good” and “evil,” “light” and “darkness,” are necessary to each other, and these philosophers might equally well maintain that a proper admixture of religion and dogma, with a little ritual added, is as necessary for man’s well-being as are the various elements in the air we breathe. Certainly the admixture extends throughout history, and it is probably prehistoric. It is also common to all lands and peoples, and might claim, with far more justice than a certain church, to be accepted “*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*”

—always, everywhere, and by all. But old age and universality do not make a thing right, else many vices might claim to occupy high positions, higher even than the dogmas.

Some words, and “dogma” is one of them, have a very innocent colorless youth, but in their old age they become sadly degenerate. It would have saved the world much sorrow and bloodshed if “dogma” had retained its original meaning of “opinion.” But it did not do so. It became, says the *New English Dictionary*:

a belief, principle, tenet; especially a tenet or doctrine authoritatively laid down by a particular church, sect, or school of thought; sometimes, depreciatingly, an imperious or arrogant declaration of opinion.

From the same authority we learn that one of the earliest instances of the use of the word in English is in 1638, where we have the expression, “The grosse fanatick Dogmataes of the Alcoran.”

To speak of the “rise and fall of dogma” covers a wide field. And it may seem rather strange to talk of the *fall* of dogma when

there are still so many millions in all parts of the world whose religious systems contain so many dogmas; and when a certain church in the enlightened West is trying to "put back the clock" at the present moment by prohibiting the clergy and the laity from reading any books of a progressive character. Nevertheless, the Twentieth century will witness, as the Nineteenth century also in some degree witnessed, the declining power of dogma: for, as true religion becomes stronger the influence of dogmas must decrease and in the end disappear. By this it is not meant that the time is near when opinions or beliefs will cease. Men must always have opinions and see things somewhat differently until the light of *perfect* knowledge is reached. But, dogmatism, or the domination of certain dogmas over the minds and lives of men, will weaken and vanish. The freedom in which we now rejoice is possible because the dogmatic spirit has lost the power it once had to crush out freedom of thought; though in many quarters the attempt is still made to shackle the minds of men.

not only in the domain of religion, but in other fields also.

The history of all religions presents very much the same phenomena in regard to the growth and influence of dogma. Very soon after the good seed is sown the enemy comes by night and scatters tares; and not infrequently the tares outgrow the wheat. But the worst of it all is, that with many foolish people, the tares are mistaken for the wheat—dogma is prized more than, or instead of, true religion. Strange as this may seem, it nevertheless has had a clear illustration in regard to the great Founder of Christianity himself. It is well known that his teaching is not only devoid of dogmatism, but is of such a character that dogma could not easily be built up upon it. For, who could build a dogma on, “Blessed are the peacemakers”; “Blessed are the pure in heart”; “Be ye therefore perfect as your Father who is in heaven is perfect”? Consequently, two sets of men have fallen into a similar error in regard to the Sermon on the Mount, and other teachings of Christ. The

unspiritual man says it is morality only, and that is the whole of religion; while certain orthodox teachers declare that the teaching of Christ is morality only, and not the real heart of religion, to get which, they say, we have to go to the epistles, and the full development of dogmas. And in harmony with this is the fact that a much larger number of sermons are based on the epistles than upon the words of Jesus himself. But is it not strange, as a prophet of the Nineteenth century remarked, that he who *himself came to be the gospel*, should have failed, in his longest and fullest discourse, to preach the gospel and should have left this to be done by his disciples! This attitude, which for many centuries was the prevailing spirit of Christianity, shows how prone men are to prefer dogma to the true spirit of religion. Moreover, it helps us to see how dogma has grown up; and the origin of dogma or its relation to true religion, is indicated by the first words of the title to this essay — “From Crypt to Pronaos.” This phrase is used to indicate a literal and histor-

ical fact; and it is also used figuratively to represent the process of thought as it proceeds from within outwards, and becomes more and more externalized and materialized.

Man, in his three-fold nature of spirit, soul, and body, is not only a type of the universe, but is also a symbol in which we see the process of unfoldment from within outwards. If the term *crypt* be regarded as the hidden center, the inmost of things, or the spirit of things, and *pronaos* the last, or outermost court of the temple, we shall have a picture of religious history in most cases. The dogmatic stage will correspond to the last, or outermost sheath of the soul, the outer court of the temple.

The history of these terms, *crypt*, and *pronaos*, is itself full of interest and instruction. In tracing historically the English use of the word *crypt*, the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the earliest appearance of the word as being in 1432: "The cripte of Seynte Michael in the mounte Gargan." This use of the word is rare, the Latin form being the one common-

ly employed. Historically, the word is used (a) "as a grotto or cavern; (b) as an underground cell, chamber, or vault, especially one beneath the floor of a church used as a burial place, and sometimes as a chapel or oratory." In 1563 a writer says: "Christians had caves under the ground called cryptae, where they for fear of persecution assembled secretly together." In 1789 Brand writes: "The chancel of the church stood upon a large vault or crypt."

Of course the use of the word in its Latin form is much older. The term *crypta* was applied to a vaulted building partly, or wholly beneath the level of the ground. Juvenal speaks of the *crypta Saburae*. Seneca calls the tunnel north of Naples *crypta Neapolitana*. And Jerome uses the same term in speaking of the Catacombs.

According to the learned Venables in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the crypt, as part of a church, had its origin in the subterranean chapel erected on the tomb of a martyr. When the tomb was not wholly below the

ground the part of the church floor over it would be raised. This fashion of raising the chancel or altar end of a church, to indicate the crypt underneath, was widely imitated even where the reason for it did not exist. In nearly every country in Europe the remains of ancient crypts exist, some of them being of Roman workmanship.

H. P. Blavatsky, in the *Glossary*, tells us that some crypts were for initiation, others for burial purposes :

There were crypts under every temple of antiquity. There was one on the Mount of Olives lined with red stucco and built before the advent of the Jews.

And in *The Secret Doctrine* we read :

There were numerous catacombs in Egypt and Chaldaea, some of them of a very vast extent. The most renowned of them were the subterranean crypts of Thebes and Memphis. The former, beginning on the western side of the Nile, extended towards the Libyan Desert, and were known as the *Serpent's* catacombs, or passages. It was there that were performed the sacred mysteries of the *kuklos anagkes*, the "Unavoidable Cycle," more generally known as the "circle of necessity." (Vol. II, p. 379)

Again, the same writer says (*op. cit.*, 588, *note*) that there are "crypts in cis-Himâlayan regions where Initiates live, and where their ashes are placed for seven lunar years." From various sources we have statements to the effect that there are vast Crypts in the East in connexion with Gonpas. One of these is referred to in *The Secret Doctrine*:

In all the large and wealthy lamaseries there are subterranean crypts and *cave-libraries*, cut in the rock, wherever the *gonpa* and *lhakhang* are situated in the mountains. . . . Along the ridge of Altyn-tagh, whose soil no European foot has ever trodden so far, there exists a certain hamlet, lost in a deep gorge. It is a small cluster of houses, a hamlet rather than a monastery, with a poor-looking temple in it, and one old lama, a hermit, living near by to watch it. Pilgrims say that the subterranean galleries and halls under it contain a collection of books, the number of which, according to the accounts given, is too large to find room even in the British Museum. (*Introd.* p. xxiv.)

II

THE WISDOM-RELIGION

THAT the Wisdom-Religion existed during pre-historic ages, and that there are proofs of this in a "complete chain of documents," H. P. Blavatsky confidently affirms. It is only by the aid of such documents, hidden in "secret caves and crypts," that much of the ancient writings, such as the Vedas, can be made intelligible. The initiates do not keep these books from the world through any policy of selfishness, but because to give out some of the things which they contain to a race of men steeped in selfishness would be like "giving a child a lighted candle in a powder magazine."

The fact is not sufficiently kept in mind by some would-be teachers that after all, there is a power behind the visible course of events that makes real progress in all ages

and lands depend on moral and spiritual growth.

In the course of modern progress we stumble onwards over the ruins of empires, frequently deaf to their voice of warning and instruction. It is possible to advance to a certain length in knowledge, or in power, but unless the moral and spiritual elements of our nature develop in harmony with the intellectual powers harm is sure to result; and in the end there will be a withdrawing of those powers which by their selfish exercise produced injury in the world. The earth is strewn with the wrecks of great nations, and great civilizations, because they were not built on the true foundation of the development and rule of the Higher Self in man. The Custodians of Wisdom have seen great material developments again and again crumble into dust. They have watched the new growths rise upon the dust and ashes of the past; and they know that the real progress of the race is always menaced by the giving of light before the eyes are ready for it; by the giving

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of power before the divine man within has sufficient control of the lower man to prevent the power from being used selfishly. Knowledge leads to power, and knowledge used selfishly injures humanity. Therefore it is the duty of the Custodians of the Secret Wisdom to keep knowledge for those who are ready or fit for it, and for them only. A Theosophical book says:

Desire power ardently. Desire peace fervently. Desire possessions above all. But those possessions must belong to the pure soul only, and be possessed therefore by all pure souls equally, and thus be the especial property of the whole only when united. Hunger for such possessions as can be held by the pure soul, that you may accumulate wealth for that united spirit of life which is your only true self.—*Light on the Path*, p. 6

The fact that civilizations have grown up and perished, and that others have slowly and painfully risen upon their ruins has led many learned authors to find the beginnings of religious life and worship in the rudest and simplest forms existing among some semi-savage

ances. The Secret Wisdom points us to many cycles of progress and decay before that age began which our wise men believe to be the first, and from which they trace existing forms of religion. The learned editor of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Professor Robertson Smith, in his work on the *Religion of the Semites*, p. 180 says that

the great natural marks of a place of worship are the fountain, the tree, and grottos and caves in the earth. At the present day almost every sacred site in Palestine has its grotto, and that this is no new thing is plain from the numerous symbols of Astarte worship found on the walls of caves in Phoenicia. There can be little doubt that the oldest Phoenician temples were natural or artificial grottoes, and that the sacred as well as the profane monuments of Phoenicia, with their marked preference for monolithic forms, point to the rock-hewn cavern as the original type that dominated the architecture of the region. (cf. Renan, *Phénicie*, p. 822)

But if this be so, the use of grottoes as temples in later times does not prove that caverns as such had any primitive religious significance. Religious practice is always conservative, and rock-hewn temples would naturally be used after men had ceased

to live like troglodytes in caves and holes of the earth.

Closely connected with this theory about caves or crypts is the fact that recent archaeological investigation has shown a tendency to find a chthonic, or earth-origin for many deities, even some which were supposed to be wholly celestial. Mr. Farnell, in vol. iv of his great work on the *Cults of the Greek States*, holds that Apollo was not at first a Sun-god, but a god connected with the earth, for in the early Greek cults there is little to connect him with the sun. Afterwards he became a War-god; and still later a Sun-god, resigning the war-lordship to Mars.

The cave or crypt may have been in some places early associated with a sacred shrine, especially if it happened to be a rent in the earth which sent forth hot air, or steam, or warm water, or peculiar vapors; but these facts carry us only a short distance into the past, and they do not explain the vast underground passages connected with ancient temples in Egypt, India, and elsewhere, in which

occult teachings were given. Robertson Smith regards the altar, the place of offerings, as the real origin of the sanctuary. Now this was in the outer court or *pronaos*, and may have been the symbol of exoteric religion; but it was not the true center or heart of the temple. Yet even this may have had an inner meaning; it may have spoken, to those whose ears were open, of the necessity for offering up the lower nature on the altar of sacrifice in the *pronaos* before the inner shrine could be approached. However, no doubt, to many it was the beginning and end of religion; just as to very many people today externals are the sum total of religion. It must be borne in mind that ancient temples were regarded as the homes of the Gods, and not as places of worship in the sense of modern churches. In most countries the temple was comparatively small, though there were some large ones, as the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, that of Hera at Samos, and some others. Dr. Seyffart says that

Only temples like that at Eleusis, in which the celebration of the Mysteries took place, were in-

tended to accomodate a large number of people. The great sacrifices and banquets shared by all the people were celebrated in the court of the temple (*περίβολος*) which included the altars for sacrifice, and was itself surrounded by a wall with only one place of entrance.

From the description given of the Jewish Tabernacle, and afterwards of the Temple, no one can fail to perceive that a perfect system of symbolism existed throughout. The outer court, the holy place, and the most holy place, roughly corresponded to the three-fold character of some Greek temples, viz. the *pronaos*, the *naos*, and the inner chamber (*ὀπισθόδομος*), which was behind the image, and where valuables were kept. The *pronaos*, or outer court, was the place of offerings.

There can be no doubt that the triple nature of man as body, soul, and spirit was signified by this form of Tabernacle and Temple. The Holy of Holies corresponded to the *Âtmâ-Buddhi* or Divine Spirit in man. Man was regarded as the little image of the universe; and the temple, with its three divisions, was

a type of man, "the temple of God." A story is recorded of a celebrated Rabbi who was mocked by a heathen for supposing that the Most High could be regarded as present in the Jewish Holy of Holies. The Rabbi brought forth a very large mirror and a very small one, and held them before his antagonist, asking him what he saw. The man answered that he saw a very large image of himself in the one mirror, and a small image in the other. Thus, said the Rabbi, do we regard the Universe and the Holy of Holies as both revealing the image of the Most High.

Nature herself continually reminds us that there is an inner aspect to all things. The molecule, the atom, the electron, or whatever name we may give the ultimate of matter on this plane, suggest an inner life, and an inner meaning everywhere. Why should the *pro-naos* of Nature's great temple contain for us the whole of what is worshipful? There is no fear that we shall exhaust the marvels and teachings she has in store for us. When we reach the holy place in any department of

truth, and veil after veil is removed — as in the Tabernacle — there will remain veil after veil behind.

The movement of light and life is from the center outwards. The development of wisdom has been from the most holy place to the outer court. The teaching is in parables, that, as Swedenborg explains, men may see a certain measure of truth without the danger of profaning what as yet they are unable to appreciate fully. For, as Jesus taught, to cast pearls before swine is to be guilty of a double folly; they will trample them underfoot, and then they will turn and rend the giver.

Looking at history as Theosophy presents it to us, not as having emerged from barbarism about ten thousand years ago, but as a vast succession of waves, with hollows between, we may at first imagine that the work of the Great Teachers of the past has been one continual failure. How puny the wisdom of today compared with that of the Sons of Light in the Third Race! How far short do we come of the material progress of the Fourth Race in

its palmy days! How much has Egypt declined from the time of the early divine rulers! How much has India gone backward! The greatness of Chaldaea is marked by shapeless ruins. Is this continual declination to mark for ever the history of humanity? Why were the Mighty Masters of Wisdom impotent to bequeath a growing light to future ages; and to prevent a corruption of the Mysteries? We may answer this when we understand why the shadows of evening lengthen, and why the sun gives less warmth in winter, and why all things have their spring-time and their winter.

The process of creation or manifestation, is from the spiritual towards the material, and then back again to the spiritual. This is the character which is stamped upon all things. Birth and youth, manhood and old age, are not accidental things in Nature. And if the decline of the Ancient Wisdom were to be continuous we might well be pessimistic. If the process were to be always towards materiality the world would be a huge mistake. But it is not so. The darkness breaks, here and

there it is shot through with shafts of light. When the lowest point of darkness or materiality is reached, then the Sun of Life and Progress begins to turn, and there will again be springtime and summer. We know this is the way of Nature in the smaller cycles of our common experience, and we may rest assured that the same great law extends throughout those realms of the manifested universe which as yet we can grasp by intuition rather than by scientific knowledge or intellectual sight.

III

THE SOURCE AND RISE OF DOGMA

NO form of teaching, it would seem, can be guarded absolutely against the risk of misconception. Words often change their meanings, and can easily be misunderstood in the course of time. Teaching by actions which are symbolical, or by pictorial representations, cannot secure to future ages a correct understanding of the meaning of those symbols, or of the suggestive actions. The Egyptian hieroglyphs in the *Book of the Dead* had already become extremely doubtful when later writers gave in the margin their explanation. And to the ordinary reader today the later explanation is often quite as enigmatical as the mystic characters which it attempts to elucidate. The same is true, though in a much smaller degree, in the case of the Hebrew Talmud; the ancient writing being in the middle of the page,

and the explanation around it. And in the case of the Bible, or even of Greek and Latin classics, who does not know that where a real obscurity occurs in the text the commentators not infrequently leave it more obscure? As to symbolical acts, the things done by Jesus the Christ at the Last Supper are regarded in very different ways by Romanists and extreme Ritualists from what they are regarded by other professing Christians.

Now creeds and dogmas must be viewed in this light. They are, first of all, the presentation in the outer court, so to speak, of deep spiritual truths. Then the process of materialization becomes more or less rapid until we have a crystallization into church dogmas. It is a process similar to the Cosmic process from the fire-mist to earth or solid rocks. Thus the defect of all dogmatic systems is an incurable defect. Or, it can be cured only by the return to that from which the materializing process took its origin. But, besides this, there are other defects in the dogmatizing process which might be, in a great

measure, prevented. The dogma-creating spirit is essentially the action of the lower *manas*, or lower mind. It is not simply that it is an attempt to give form and materiality to the Infinite, or the Spiritual, it is the mind, as apart from feeling, giving things its own embodiment.

Now, it is a strange but well-known fact, that no perfect agreement is possible between men so long as truths are viewed from the standpoint of the intellect only, whereas, all men instantly agree on matters of the heart. We can see the truth of this by supposing any good action done before men of the most dissimilar mental status. They will all at once recognize that it is a good thing to help those in distress, to save a person from drowning, or from being burnt. But no two people, very likely, have quite the same idea of God, or would explain any great spiritual truths in quite the same way. Therefore the mischief of creeds and of men being dominated by them, springs from a radical error. Unity, for ordinary men, can never be reached on the

plane of the brain-mind. We agree as to what is good, but we cannot reach the same unanimity in regard to what is true, except, perhaps, in geometry or mathematics. And, still further, the creeds have nearly always changed natural ideas into ideas bounded by merely human-legal relations. Christianity has suffered in this way owing to the fact that a Latin spirit took the place of the Greek spirit. A well-known, and even orthodox professor in Great Britain has said that the change from the Greek *nomos* to the Latin *lex* aptly indicates the change that came over the spirit of early Christianity. Truths, from being vital or natural principles, as the Greek conception favored, became legal in the sense of a Roman law-court. This vast and radical change of spirit runs through all the centuries, and it may be called the spirit of petrification that has changed the living tree into a stone. No wonder then that the Professor just mentioned declares that Christ has been buried for over 1000 years in sacramentarian theories, dogmas, and even in the Bible itself.

No doubt Christianity has retained, though in a changed form, many Greek ideas, as it has borrowed many things from other sources; but the Latin spirit became the spirit of theology, of dogma, and creeds; and the mystic, spiritual element, like the dove sent forth by Noah, found no resting place. Nor did the Reformation cure this lamentable condition of things. The hard dogmatic spirit sprang up in Protestantism as much as ever it had done in the Roman church. And, while there were great and good men, men with spiritual aspirations in many places, their voices were drowned in the general clamor for dogmatic teaching. And even yet the dogmatic spirit rules in the churches, though there have been many hopeful signs during the last forty years or so of a return to the spirit of Jesus. But the creeds and dogmas will die hard, for they are entrenched in rich endowments, and fortified by trust-deeds and all the machinery of ecclesiastical courts. The dying process is sure to come, however; indeed, it is already here. The knell of dogma has sounded. Hu-

manity is moving on the ascending cycle. The great Theosophical Movement, which has never ceased through the ages, is now moving like the birth of Spring, both in the East and in the West. A brighter day is near for those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. The time for the prisoners to become free, and for the fetters of creeds and dogmas to fall from the souls of men that they may walk forth in a large liberty and do the works of righteousness, has now come.

Although the birth and decline of dogma in the Western world claim our attention chiefly, it must not be supposed that human nature and the history of religions have been very different in the East from what they have been in the West.

In Europe, church missionaries, for reasons of policy, incorporated native ideas in the new teaching. The old cults baptized with new names made the work of conversion much easier and quicker. Jesuit missionaries in the East, in more recent times, carried this principle of accommodation to such a length that

even Rome thought they were going too far — the line had to be drawn somewhere!

Similar phenomena may be observed in the case of other religions. There is the growth of ecclesiastic power. There is the withholding of knowledge from the people — for knowledge leads to power — in order that the people may be more pliant, and more easily ruled by the hierarchy. There is also the natural tendency of the lower human nature to drag down things spiritual to the material plane; and then, on the part of the teachers there is an insensible, but constant giving way to this worldly tendency in order that ecclesiastical control may be more easily maintained. It has ever been the temptation to gain influence for religion by worldly means. This was part of the temptation of Jesus — worship me and your laudable object of saving humanity will be gained in the shortest and easiest way, all the kingdoms of the earth shall be thine. This temptation has existed in all ages, and it is all the more powerful and dangerous, because, in its first stages at least, it is related

to a true principle of conduct. When a reformer or teacher wishes to uplift, or help any portion of humanity, he must, of course, put himself on the plane of those he wishes to teach or help. He must be born. He must come to them. He must not antagonize them. He must accommodate himself, and his teaching also, to their needs and capabilities. All this is very simple, and it is very easily seen, and it is most reasonable. But it is just on this matter of accommodation that the ground becomes slippery. As a matter of necessity Truth is veiled to the finite comprehension. The danger is in keeping the same veil too long, instead of gradually withdrawing it in order that a more spiritual perception of the Truth may be reached by the people generally. If this were done the process from the outer court to the holy place would be natural and continuous. But in most cases the symbol, or representation, has been allowed to degenerate or materialize the conceptions of the worshipers instead of becoming an avenue of more light. This is, in a word, the history of the

growth of dogma. It is the growth of the material, the outward, instead of the spiritual. The history of religions is an illustration of this. Even in modern history we see it clearly presented. From the days of the Puritans, say, until now, what a change there has been in giving way to the pleasure-loving side of men's natures. No doubt the Puritan was wrong in supposing that joy was to be banished, and that sour looks and ways were virtuous. But, consider now how the lower nature is petted and pleased. In how many cases do we not see the bribing of the lower nature to get people to attend church and become religious, or appear to be so! While it is not the part of wisdom to antagonize those whom we would uplift, it is not the part of wisdom to pander to the lower natures of those whose lower natures we wish to purify and transmute into perfect oneness with the Higher Self within.

This fundamental conception lies at the root of all religions. It has to be seen clearly if we would trace the working of Truth and

Justice in the education of humanity. Every revelation veils while it reveals. The danger is when this is forgotten, and when the imperfect and impartial representation is taken for what is perfect. We read that in the Jewish tabernacle the ends of the staves which were in the rings of the Ark protruded so that the veil which concealed the most holy place was pressed outward. This was a continual reminder to all who saw it, that the Ark *was there* behind the veil. In all religions the thought should be kept in mind that the symbol is only a symbol and not the thing itself; that the dogma or creed is only an imperfect, tentative presentation of deep spiritual truths as seen by imperfect minds; and that the creed or dogma is capable of revision, and should be revised from time to time. An old writer says, "Words are the wise man's counters, but they are the money of fools." The same may be said of all attempts to put in concrete form what is spiritual. To the wise man it is a symbol only, a reminder of the truth, but to the foolish it takes the place of reality. This

limiting, materializing, or crystallizing tendency, this mistaking of the outer court for the holy place, is a great danger to which mankind has been liable through all the ages, and it is a danger still. The temptation to imagine that perfection has been reached, or that the complete Truth has been attained is one which we need continually to guard against. It has always ministered to the feeling of self-content, or self-sufficiency to think — “ We have the only true religion, the only correct doctrine ” — and men in all lands and ages have thus been hindered from further progress. Closely related to this is the tendency to condemn others. We need the wider outlook and the larger heart to enable us to regard all men as our brethren, and learners in the same great School of Life.

IV

DIFFERENT DOGMAS OF BAPTISM

IF we begin with the life of man in the flesh we shall see that from birth until death he has been encased in dogmas. Baptismal regeneration is first in order of time. With some churches baptism is said to make the child "an heir of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." It was the strange fiction of the church that the child came into this world under the power of evil. Instead of thinking with Wordsworth that "heaven lies about us in our infancy"; or that "trailing clouds of glory do we come from God, who is our home," the Council of Trent confirmed the dogma of centuries, that "from the fall of man till his baptism, the Devil has full power over man, and possesses him by right." This gives the priesthood a very powerful control over the parents, and also over the child

from the very beginning of life. If the child is born with an evil spirit which has to be cast out, and the priest is the only person who can exorcise the evil spirit, then it goes without saying that the priest must be all-important, and baptism of the utmost necessity. If the dogma be true, no father or mother could wish to neglect such a miraculous rite as this. There is a double exorcism of the evil spirit, first when the priest says, "come out of this child thou evil spirit, and make room for the Holy Ghost"; and afterwards at the font when the priest again exorcises the evil spirit, and rubs a little of his own spittle with the thumb of his right hand on ear and nostril, saying, "be thou opened" (*ephphatha*), in imitation of the action of Jesus (Mark vii, 34). Then, after anointing with oil in the form of a cross between the shoulders, and calling on the child to renounce the Devil and all his works, the priest pours holy water thrice on the child's head in the name of the Trinity.

Did the church get this elaborate rite from Jesus, or the early apostolic practice, or did

it concoct the thing partly out of its own fancy, and partly out of scraps of ancient religions? Anyone can see from the New Testament what a simple thing baptism was. We read that great crowds went out to the baptism of John. "Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." (Matt. iii, 5.) In the days of the apostles, "repent and be baptized, every one of you," are the words which St. Peter is said to have used. From the former passage it is evident that baptism had been in use before the coming of Jesus. The Christian church did not invent it, but adopted it. Jesus was baptized, though it is not said that any of the apostles were ever baptized. At any rate the rite was a very simple one in the earliest days of Christianity. It had a very beautiful significance. As water cleanses the body, and keeps us in health, and without it we could not live, it was regarded as a fitting symbol of the action of truth in cleansing the mind, and producing mental well-being. All must be

familiar with such expressions as, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." But, in later times baptism became a very elaborate rite; and Professor Lindsay in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, after describing some of these ceremonies, says: "It could easily be shown that a great deal of this complex ceremonial took its origin from the introduction of Pagan ceremonies into the Christian worship." H. P. Blavatsky shows how the Romish church has borrowed extensively from Paganism, without always making acknowledgment.

Among the ancients one form of purification was symbolized by the use of water, and another by fire. In *Isis Unveiled*, vol. I, p. 519, we read concerning the great pyramid:

Internally, it was a majestic fane, in whose somber recesses were performed the Mysteries, and whose walls had often witnessed the initiation scenes of members of the royal family. The porphyry sarcophagus, which Professor Piazzzi Smyth, Astronomer Royal of Scotland, degrades into a corn-bin, was

the *baptismal font*, upon emerging from which, the neophyte was "born again," and became an *adept*.

According to Apuleius, cleansing by water always preceded initiation into the Egyptian and Eleusinian Mysteries. Among the Jews, converts were admitted only after purification by water, to signify that they were cleansed of all their sins. Fire and water were sometimes combined. Ovid (*Fasti iv*, 727) says, "Often, in truth, have I leaped over the fires placed in three rows, and the dripping bough of laurel has flung the sprinkled waters." Dionysius tells us that Romulus, while building the city of Rome had fires kindled and made his people jump through them for purposes of purification or expiation. Payne Knight says that among the Hindûs, Irish, and Phoenicians, passing through the fire was a well-known ceremony. In *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. II, p. 566, *note*, we read that,

In the Cycle of Initiation, which was very long, water represented the first and lower steps toward purification, while trials connected with *fire* came

last. Water could regenerate the body of matter; FIRE alone, that of the *inner* Spiritual man.

In *Isis Unveiled*, vol. II, pp. 134, 138, it is said that,

Baptism is one of the oldest rites and was practised by all the nations in their Mysteries, as sacred ablutions. . . . In the Mithraic sacrifices, during the initiation, a preliminary scene of death was simulated by the neophyte, and it preceded the scene showing him himself "being born again by the rite of *baptism*."

And again, we are told that the Brâhman priest, in order to wash the images of the Gods from the sins of the people, plunges them three times into the water in the name of the mystic trinity. This is very suggestive of the Romanist ritual, in which, as we have seen, there is a threefold application of water, in the name of the Trinity. In the time of Tertullian baptism was well known to be an ancient rite. In reference to the worship of Isis, he says: "In certain sacred rites of the heathen, the mode of initiation is by baptism." And in his day there were some who protested

against water-baptism as being opposed to the spirituality of Jesus' religion, and a revival of heathenish and Jewish customs. But these early Quakers were rebuked by the Fathers in the choice language often adopted by early religious controversialists, and were called *serpents*, for, says Tertullian: "vipers, asps, and king serpents themselves mostly look after places that are dry and without water." (Bonwick, *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*.)

The rite of baptism seems to have been practised in all the great countries of the world. The dogmatic teachings in regard to it are evidently not derived from the teaching or practice of Jesus, or his immediate disciples, but are in part a transference of ancient ceremonies used when adults were being admitted into the Mysteries. It is but fair to say that most of the Protestant Churches regard baptism as coming in the room of the Old Testament rite by which the children of the Jews were, on the eighth day, admitted into the Jewish Church; and, except for the use of water, they also abjure all forms and dogmas

in connexion with baptism. Among Protestants, baptism and the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, are the only recognized sacraments; because it is held that a *Christian* Sacrament must be an ordinance instituted by *Christ himself*. At the same time it is acknowledged that baptism existed before the time of Jesus, just as the Passover existed before the Lord's Supper. It is held, however, that Jesus gave a new significance and power by his command to observe these two rites.

V

THE "LORD'S SUPPER"

ABOUT no point, not even about baptism has the conflict been waged more fiercely than over the meaning of the Eucharist. The four places in the New Testament where the institution of the Lord's Supper is mentioned are Matt. xxvi, Mark xiv, Luke xxii, and I Cor. xi, and they substantially agree. The account is, that after a meal with his disciples on the night before the betrayal, Jesus instituted an ordinance which the disciples were to observe in his memory. It is said that in doing so,

as they were eating, Jesus took a loaf, and blessed, and brake it; and he gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup and gave *thanks* (hence the term Eucharist), and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many unto remission of sins. (Matt. xxvi.)

St. Paul, whose account may be the earliest, mentions only one giving of thanks, that before breaking the bread. The phrase, "unto remission of sins," is peculiar to the gospel of Matthew. From the four accounts it is evident that Jesus used the bread and wine to represent himself, his body and blood, and that the disciples were to keep the rite in his memory. Out of this simple ordinance the most astounding dogmas have grown. What was intended by Jesus to help towards a real unity, or *communion*, or brotherhood, has become "a stone of stumbling"; and an occasion of foolish pretension, and uncharitableness. St. Paul, too, dwelt on the idea that the Christ-spirit should be realized as the One Life in all disciples; just as in a family all partake of the same physical food, and have bodily nourishment. Very soon, however, something of a magical influence was ascribed to the bread and wine after having been blessed by the priest. And, in an early canon (xviii, *Nicaea*) we find that deacons must not give the bread and wine to priests, but receive it

from them; also the deacons must not sit on the same row of seats with the priests! Alas! for the true spirit of communion, or brotherhood. This striving for front seats has had much to do with the delay of the coming of the Christos. How different this from the spirit of Christ! How different is this canon of the council of bishops from the teaching of Theosophy, "Step out from sunlight into shade to make more room for others."

The doctrine of transubstantiation is the name given to this dogma promulgated by the Roman church concerning the Lord's Supper. According to this dogma, after the priest blesses the bread and wine they are changed into the "body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ," and they have a magical effect upon the recipient. It is not maintained that the *qualities* of the bread and wine are changed, but it is held that their *essence* is changed. That is to say, no priest would take the bread and wine if he knew that some person had put poison in them. Though the priest declares that his blessing changes the *essence* of

the bread and wine into the essence of Christ he does not pretend that it alters the *qualities*, or phenomena! For it could be too easily proved that it does not.

Luther held that while there was no change of essence, yet there was a real presence of Christ *together with* the bread and wine. This dogma is called *consubstantiation*, and it is the view held by the Lutheran church. Zwingli regarded the Eucharist as mainly a commemorative act. Calvin held something of a middle position between Luther and Zwingli. The "Confession of Faith" made at Westminster, and established by acts of Parliament in 1649 and 1690, declared very clearly that the Lord's Supper was not to be regarded as a "sacrifice," but only commemorative of Christ and what he had done. It also declared that in this sacrament there was no change either in essence (substance) or qualities; and that the true partaking of it was a spiritual realizing of Christ in the heart of the believer. It is important to notice the teachings regarding the Eucharist because it is a very vital ques-

tion in connexion with the Reformation in England, and it is coming up at the present time. In a work on the *History of Ritualism* recently published, it is maintained that while the struggle between Henry VIII and the Pope was mainly over the question as to who was ruler in England, yet the deeper cause of division between the Reformers and the Romanists was the so-called "Sacrifice of the Mass." In an extant letter from Pole, the Pope's Legate, this is clearly stated. Latimer declared that he had "read the New Testament over seven times, yet could not find the mass in it." The word "mass," by the way, had no essential connexion with the Eucharist, but is a (presumed) contraction of "*Ite, missa est*," the words of dismissal to the congregation. It is a term entirely inappropriate as applied to the ceremony of the Eucharist and it cannot be traced back beyond the time of Ambrose.

While the Eucharist is said to be traced back to Jesus, like many other Christian rites and dogmas it finds close parallels in the re-

ligious customs of ancient times. In *Isis Unveiled*, vol. II, pp. 43, 44, we read:

Nor does the Mystery of the Eucharist pertain to Christians alone. Godfrey Higgins proves that it was instituted many hundreds of years before the "Paschal Supper," and says that "the sacrifice of bread and wine was common to many ancient nations." Cicero mentions it in his works and wonders at the strangeness of the rite. There had been an esoteric meaning attached to it from the first establishment of the Mysteries, and the *Eucharistia* is one of the oldest rites of antiquity. With the hierophants it had nearly the same significance as with the Christians. Ceres was *bread*, and Bacchus was *wine*; the former meaning regeneration of life from the seed, and the latter—the grape—the emblem of wisdom and knowledge; the accumulation of the spirit of things, and the fermentation and subsequent strength of that esoteric knowledge being justly symbolized by wine.

Froude is said to have written in 1891 to Professor Johnson, author of *Antiqua Mater*, saying: "I have long been convinced that the Christian Eucharist is but a continuation of the Eleusinian Mysteries. St. Paul, in using the word *teleiois* (I Cor. ii, 6) confirms this."

And he (Froude) refers to the words in Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* (xvi): "although bread is called Ceres and wine Liber, no one can be so foolish as to imagine he eats and drinks God." Bonwick (*Egyptian Belief*, p. 417 *et seq.*) says that the Egyptians declared the bread after the sacerdotal rites to be mystically the body of Isis and Osiris. The cakes were round and were placed on the altar. He quotes Gliddon and Melville as saying that they were "identical in shape with the consecrated cake of the Roman Catholic and Eastern churches," and that "the Egyptians marked the holy bread with St. Andrew's cross." Bonwick adds, that

The *Presence* bread was broken before being distributed by the priests to the people, and was supposed to become the flesh and blood of the Deity. The miracle was wrought by the hand of the officiating priest, who blessed the food. Singularly enough, the mark of that action is still to be seen in specimens remaining in Egypt; for Rougé tells us, "The bread offerings bear the *imprint of the fingers*, the mark of consecration."

In Egypt, as in Rome, the bread was given

to the people, but not the wine. In this the difference between the words of Jesus in the New Testament, and the Egypto-Romanist rite is very marked. The Persians had a similar rite in which a solid and a liquid were used. In the Dionysiac cult wine was used to represent the life of the world. Justin Martyr speaking of the Eucharist says:

In imitation of which the Devil did the like in the Mysteries of Mithras, for you either know or may know that they take bread and a cup of water in the sacrifices of those that are initiated, and pronounce certain words over it. (*Ibid.*)

In regard to the rites of Mithras it may not be out of place to quote the words of such a learned Orientalist as Renan (*Hibbert Lecture* 1880, p. 35 *et seq.*). He says:

In the second and third centuries Mithraic worship attained an extraordinary prevalence. I sometimes permit myself to say that if Christianity had not carried the day, Mithraicism would have become the religion of the world. It had its mysterious meetings; its chapels, which bore a strong resemblance to little churches. It forged a very lasting bond of brotherhood between its initiates: it had

a Eucharist, a Supper so like the Christian Mysteries, that good Justin Martyr, the Apologist, can find only one explanation of the apparent identity, namely, that Satan, in order to deceive the human race, determined to imitate the Christian ceremonies, and so stole them. A Mithraic sepulcher in the Roman Catacombs is as edifying, and presents as elevated a mysticism as the Christian tombs.

King, in his work on *The Gnostics and Their Remains*, p. 126, says:

The worship of Mithras long kept its ground under Christian Emperors in the capital itself, and doubtless survived its overthrow there for many generations longer in the remote and then semi-independent provinces.

The point of chief interest in comparing Romanist ritual and dogma with those of pre-Christian times, is not simply the fact that the primitive simplicity of Jesus is lost in the picture composed of colors borrowed from ancient religions; but the chief interest is found in the fact that in the course of time those ancient rites and symbols became darkened with superstition and enthrallment. Liberation can only come through men waking to

the light of Truth; in that light they can, if they will, walk forth as freed men. As the light of the New Age, upon which we have now entered, becomes greater and greater it will be impossible for humanity to sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death. It will feel shame for having crouched so long beneath the reign of dogmatic forms. The study of comparative religion, and the gradual turning over, by archaeology, of the leaves of a forgotten past; the general advance of thought on many lines; and last, but not least, the fuller revelation of the Ancient Wisdom-Religion, given in Theosophy, is making it impossible for the old dogmas to retain their dogmatic influence much longer. The sunlight still floods the land, though we may shut our windows. We do not change things by hiding our heads in the sand.

VI

THE TRINITY

THE dogma of the Trinity is another of those dogmas which is older than Christianity. But here, perhaps, less than anywhere else can Christianity be said to spring from ordinary Judaism. The Divine Unity — "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One" — sounds from every synagogue. The Jews before the Captivity were given to various forms of idolatry, but their conception of the Most High as a Unity, not as a Trinity, marks Jewish thought from first to last. In other words, they kept the First Commandment, even when they did not keep the Second. And yet the esoteric teaching with them was wonderfully like the esoteric teaching of other ancient peoples. Franck, writing of the *Sepher Ictzirah*, says:

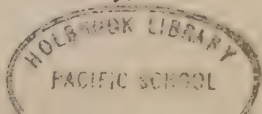
The last word of this system is the substitution

of absolute divine Unity for every idea of Dualism, for that pagan philosophy which saw in matter an eternal substance whose laws were not in accord with the Divine Will . . . in fact, in the *Sepher Jetzirah*, God, considered as the Infinite, and consequently indefinable Being extended throughout all things by his power and existence, is while above, yet not outside of numbers, sounds, and letters — the principles and general laws which we recognize.

In the *Kabbalah* we have Unity as the highest conception of the Illimitable One:

In Him is an illimitable abyss of glory, and from it there goeth forth one little spark which maketh the glory of the sun, and of the moon, and of the stars. (Mathers, *Kabbalah Unveiled*, p. 19.)

The Illimitable One exists as a Trinity in the veils of the first three Sephiroth. From this proceeds the *Intellectual world*, considered as a trinity: *Kether*, the crown, *Binah*, intelligence, and *Chokmah*, wisdom. In fact the esoteric teaching in the *Kabbalah* and that found in Eastern philosophy very closely correspond. This may be seen at a glance in *Isis Unveiled*, vol. II, p. 264. But, for the ordinary Jewish thinker the Divine Unity, or



Monotheism, has been the chief, if not the only teaching.

The success of Mohammedanism is due in no small degree to its theological definiteness, and its simplicity: "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet." We might sum up Judaism in similar words: God is One and Moses is his prophet.

The Divine Unity, and the Divine manifested as a Trinity are equally true, and both may be traced to the Ancient Wisdom-Religion. But the modern anthropomorphic Trinity is a very degenerate fiction which later ages have fashioned and worshiped. Some theologians have tried, without much success, to show that there is a great difference between a triad and a trinity; the former, of course, being the oriental, and the later the ecclesiastical term, and concept. The ordinary dogma concerning the Trinity is to this effect: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are not three Gods, but only one God, yet each is God. They are three, and yet only one. They exist as three persons. It should be noted that the term "*person*"

as employed here is claimed to be not the "*persona*" from which the word was originally derived. The ordinary conception of personality implies limitation, but the theologian does not admit that the Persons of the Trinity are finite. Nor are they merely "*aspects*," though that certainly comes nearer it than any other term that can be employed. In truth, when we try to describe, in words of human language, the Infinite, we must very soon become aware of their inadequacy. Our words are born of finite ideas, and are often closely allied to material things, therefore it is impossible that they should suffice to define, describe, or denote the Illimitable, the Absolute. Even our word *spirit* refers originally to the "breath," and the terms "Infinite," and "Absolute" are simply negative terms. "Most High" carries with it the conception of higher and lower and we know that such ideas cannot apply to Deity. Every term in language must be more or less anthropomorphic; but there is a very low form of anthropomorphic conception popularly in use in regard to the

Trinity. The first person of the Trinity is stern, and is looked upon as a judge; the Son is merciful; the third person of the Trinity is less capable of being expressed in human language, therefore ordinary conceptions are much more vague, much less definite about the Holy Ghost than about the Father and the Son. These very narrow and imperfect conceptions of God might be regarded as comparatively harmless, were it not that such frightful dogmas have been built upon them. The common orthodox theology is fabricated out of misunderstood esoteric teaching. Indeed all metaphysical teachings must be more or less misunderstood by the mass of mankind. Few now regard Adam and Eve as the progenitors of humanity 6000 years ago. The idea of a garden in which trees of knowledge, and of life, grow, is seen to be allegorical. The "Fall," as taught by orthodoxy, never existed except in theological imagination, and it is only a travesty of the true, ancient teaching. The fall was the descent of spirit, of the Sons of Light, into matter; and it was

part of the great evolutionary process, leading from good to better, best.

But even theologians themselves have not always been of the same mind in explaining the functions of the Trinity. For about 1000 years it was the orthodox teaching that Christ by his death paid the Devil in order that man might be thus redeemed, or bought back. Man, it was held, had sold himself to the Devil; and even the Devil must not be cheated! From the time of Anselm onward the "improved" explanation was that Christ paid the penalty to God the Father, seeing that man by his sin had become the prisoner of divine justice. It was the old Roman law (*lex*) idea, of God as a judge, again becoming prominent. Justice had to be satisfied. Man had sinned against the INFINITE, and that was held to be an *infinite transgression* — therefore no amount of suffering on man's part could exhaust it, man being finite. Karmic retribution was held to be inadequate. Spurgeon and others held that sin could not exhaust itself: "Man sinned while he suffered, therefore by

the very nature and necessity of the case, sin was an eternal evil; eternity could not exhaust it." Man could only be saved by an *infinite* sufferer in his stead, *i. e.*, by Christ. Against this, many of the more liberal theologians held that a *finite creature* (man) could not commit an *infinite sin*.

The whole theological conception is a miserable nightmare of ages of darkness. Truly man makes his God in his own image; and the supposed relationship of the persons of the Trinity to each other, and to man, is very much on the level of the ordinary law court. It is often said that Christ came to reveal God to man as the heavenly Father; but in a very few centuries the churches, saturated with the legal and materialistic spirit of Rome, made a trinity in which the first person is an implacable judge who must have full payment even though the innocent should suffer for the guilty.

Now, this dogma of the Trinity, this unworthy conception of the Eternal, truly belongs to the outer court. What then is the

truth, the inner teaching, of which the ordinary theological dogma is such a perversion? It is a fact that on the great stairway of the Universe the higher helps the lower. The soul must descend into matter to fulfil the great cycle of evolution, of the Great Breath. The Great Helpers may be truly said to lay their lives down as a pathway for weaker lives. As the sun gives light and life to the planets, so in like manner does the divine principle run through all from the highest down to man and beyond. It is in a sense suffering for others; but it is that of the mother for her child; that of the teacher for his pupil; not that of a guilty person going free by casting his sins on someone else.

The Eastern conception of the One Life manifesting itself under the threefold aspects of Brahmâ, Vishnu, and S'iva, has probably become nearly as much materialized in India as the corresponding dogma has in Western lands. The right conception can be reached only by seeking the primitive teaching, the shrine, not the *pronaos*. To study the septen-

ary constitution of man is the best way to get a true conception of what is above man: above, and yet in man; for we are even now temples of God, and the Holy Ghost dwells in us, as the Christian scripture says.

This is the ancient teaching which is needed to give wisdom to man. To realize that there is in us the potency of all the planes of the universe, while, at the same time we feel, "not as though we had already attained," this is to have true humility and sublime hope. "For *now* are we the Sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Man has within him the Holy of Holies, the Spark of the One Flame. To lift the lower nature into closer and closer union, or harmony with this Central Shrine is to live in harmony with the Soul and movement of the universe. Nothing can prevent the perfect justice, or Karma, of the man of sin within us reaping what he has sown; but by the union of the lower nature with the Christ in us a mighty change of relation is brought about. As this is studied and realized by men generally the crudities of

ecclesiasticism, and all the ecclesiastical fabrication and manipulation of sacraments to secure heaven will vanish like the shapes of darkness before the rising sun. Much of it has already vanished. And every few years the world of thinking people is bursting through dogma after dogma, as the growing tree casts its bark.

VII

THE DEVIL AND ATONEMENT

NEXT to the Trinity the most important dogma to be found in ecclesiasticism is concerning the Devil. Many have maintained that without the Devil the church could not exist. It is one of the saddest aspects of our lower human nature that in the East and West alike such horrible pictures of devils and hells should have been invented. Happily this dogma is no longer accepted by intelligent men; though not a few among the ignorant and superstitious are still in the bondage of fear. No doubt there may be a certain loosening of restraint as the old terrors pass away, and the lower selfish nature has not yet come under the control and impulse of the soul within. No doubt men who have been terrorized into morality by fear of the Devil, or hell, will not all at once learn to hate evil in itself and

avoid it, and to do good for the love of it; but true morality is in the motive, and fear is an infinitely lower motive than love.

Closely connected with the dogmas of the Trinity and of the Devil, is that of the atonement, which we have touched upon already. The true at-one-ment is the transforming of the lower nature into the image of the Christos within. This is the real alchemy, the change of the lead of the lower man into the pure gold of the higher. Of all miracles, or wonders, this is the greatest; compared with it the transmutation of physical substances would be trivial. But dogmatic teaching has completely changed this great fact of nature into a legal or mercantile transaction. By the "propitiatory sacrifice" of Christ, as it is called, God is said to be reconciled to man, or as others put it, man is reconciled unto God. The ancient and true teaching is that a great vital change takes place in man, in harmony with Cosmic Law, or the Life of the Universe. The inmost of man is indeed the secret place of the Most High. The lower

nature of man corresponds to the *pronaos* of the temple. Instead of this, orthodox dogma makes God a something outside of man, who must be propitiated for Adam's offense in the Garden of Eden. Instead of the return of the prodigal son which Christ pictures; instead of the great Cosmic process of return to the Divine, of which the change in man is a clear type and illustration, dogmatic theology gives us the noisy machinery of a law-court. For the heavenly Father revealed by Jesus we have the Roman magistrate. And man, instead of being a Son of God, as the Bible says, is declared by the church to be the child of the Devil. Salvation is made a legal or mechanical thing, for the supposed magical power of the properly ordained priest is said to drive out the Devil and introduce the Divine Spirit. There is still need for Jesus to say, "the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life."

It may easily be seen that the whole vast structure of dogma is like an inverted pyramid.

For if the story of Adam and Eve be allegorical teaching about primitive man before he had a coat of skin (that is, a *physical* body) then how baseless are all the dogmas which have been reared upon this allegory read as a literal fact! History is the great drama of the soul. There is no such thing as *profane* history; all is the shadow of the Divine. The Incarnation is the very life of the Universe, and true on all planes. It is the in-dwelling of the Christ, or Christos, "Christ *in you* the hope of glory," as the apostle says.

VIII

DIVINE INCARNATIONS

AS part of the great "Redemption," or "Return," it has been the ancient teaching that in times of great need in the life of humanity, at certain cyclic periods, a lofty embodiment of the Divine takes place. Thus, in the *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, ch. iv, Krishna says:

I produce myself among creatures, O son of Bhârata, whenever there is a decline of virtue and an insurrection of vice and injustice in the world: and thus I incarnate from age to age for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of righteousness.

It is this great world-fact that helps us to understand the wonderful resemblances recorded concerning the Great Teachers throughout the ages. It is well known that the idea of the Logos was common to Egyptians, Hindûs, Persians, Chaldaeans, and other nations.

From what source except the great Wisdom-Religion could these different nations have obtained it? Among the Egyptians Thoth is called the Word, or Logos. "I know the mystery of the Divine Word," is the translation of the characters found on a stele in the Louvre. Lenormant speaks of the doctrine of the Logos as being almost universal. Bonwick says: "The Incarnation idea is well illustrated in Egyptian theology. It is not the vulgar, coarse and sensual story as in Greek mythology, but refined, moral, and spiritual." (*op. cit.* p. 406.) And in this connexion the author of the Tract Society's work on Egypt writes:

This most ancient theology, taught to the initiated and concealed from the vulgar, that God created all things at first by the primary emanation from Himself, his first-born, who was the author and giver of all wisdom and all knowledge in heaven and in earth, being at the same time the Wisdom and the Word of God.

According to Mr. Sharpe, the Egyptologist, the whole idea of the incarnation and birth by

a virgin is depicted on the wall of a temple at Thebes. Gerald Massey in his *Egyptian Exodus*, has these words:

We shall see the good Osiris, and his Son the
Word made true,

Who died and rose—the Karast!—in the Aah-
en-Ru.

He who daily dies to save us, passing Earth and
Hades through;

Lays his life down for a pathway to the Aah-
en-Ru.

Among the Assyrians the Logos was known as the *Marduk*. He was the eldest Son of Hea; and was named the merciful one. In Kitto's *Biblical Cyclopaedia* we read concerning the Logos:

This mysterious doctrine of Emanation is at once the most universal and the most memorable of traditions; so universal, that traces of it may be found throughout the whole world; so ancient, that its source is hidden in the grey mists of antiquity.

It must be acknowledged by every impartial student of the history of comparative religion that the dogmas of all religions represent a

very materialistic, and a very inadequate conception of the One Life and Its manifestations. But, notwithstanding the great changes and obscurations produced by dogmatic theology, there is generally some point or points which serve as a connecting link between the Ancient Wisdom-Religion and the ecclesiastical dogmas of today. We have seen how unworthy are the modern anthropomorphic conceptions of the Eternal. Man has made his God in his own image truly, not according to the glory of the inner sanctuary, but after the likeness of the outer court, the lower human mind. And mankind as a whole must suffer on account of these false conceptions of the Highest.

IX

“ORIGINAL SIN” AND PERFECTION

THERE is another matter of vital importance — man's idea of his own nature; and in regard to this the church dogmas have exerted a most baleful influence. The doctrine of innate human depravity, or of original sin, has settled like a dark cloud over a large part of the human race. The true, celestial origin of the real Self was lost sight of in the course of ages, and man's conception of himself became more and more confined to, and identified with the body and the lower mind. Hence it is that in the Old Testament we find very little said about the real nature of man. The true knowledge was no doubt concealed in symbols and in ritual; but, for the mass of the people, the Old Testament scriptures teach little about the hereafter. In the New Testament the consciousness of immortality becomes

clearer; but even in the writings of St. Paul we do not find a very distinct teaching as to the nature of man. So much is this the case that scholars maintain that the threefold nature of man as spirit, soul, and body, cannot be very clearly deduced from the New Testament use of these words in one or two places, soul and spirit being often used interchangeably. So it came to be the common notion that man was a body possessing a soul, instead of man realizing that he *is a soul*, and that the body is only a temporary covering — an outer coat — and no part of the real man at all. It thus remained for the scientific materialists of the present day to discover that man is only a collection of atoms, some of whose functions are called mind! Who will deny that mankind has reached the lowest point of the arc of descent into matter? The materialist is a monist, but to him matter is the one and only thing, and not spirit. And yet St. Paul had said plainly that there is a natural body and that there is a spiritual body. And the image of the grain of wheat which he uses was a

teaching which he either saw, or might have seen in the Mysteries. The ancient oracle "Know Thyself," must ever be regarded as of supreme importance; and, what we know ourselves to be is the yard-stick by which we measure all things else.

For popular teaching it is perhaps sufficient to speak of the higher mind, and the lower mind; or the carnal man, and the spiritual man, of St. Paul. Every one is at once conscious of two forces struggling within; a selfish power, and an unselfish power. This struggle is the Great War, the Holy War. But for many thoughtful people the knowledge of man as septenary, and his correspondence, therefore, with this septenary universe, as taught by Theosophy, must prove to be a revelation of the greatest importance. It is not merely a speculative truth, it has many practical bearings also. As we study ourselves and get to understand better what we are, we see more clearly the path to deliverance. We understand better the tyranny of the lower nature, whose selfishness has caused so much

misery in the world; and we are enabled to reach to the true and harmonious order and relationship of all the principles. This is that state when the Divine Will is done on earth as it is in heaven. This is the real meaning of the "coming of the Kingdom." We may be perfectly certain that nothing can be more hurtful to man than this low and erroneous idea of human nature which dogmatic teaching has foisted upon the world for nearly two thousand years. On the other hand, the true conception of man's sevenfold nature, and the realization of his inherent divinity, must prove a source of light, hope, and strength. Being conscious of the Christos as our *real Self* within, we must feel that "upward calling" of which the initiate apostle speaks.

Dogmatic theology as expressed in creeds may be likened to a hard shell which prevents the germ inside from expanding. There is a germ of truth which may be traced to very ancient times, but this germ, instead of being allowed to expand and become a tree of wisdom, is imprisoned through the ages. The

whole system by which creeds have been made and perpetuated is entirely hurtful to man's inner nature. In the first place, from a very small beginning, a vast and complicated statement is concocted through much debate, passion, and conflict. The decision, of perhaps a bare majority of men, prompted in some instances by spite against some person, is the foundation of a creed, or some part of a creed. And even were the elements of passion and prejudice absent: even if absolute unanimity existed among those making the creed, there is no reason why their opinions should become a binding law upon future generations, making progress difficult or impossible. In the very nature of things men's minds should expand, their views widen; therefore, there should be a revision of creeds periodically. Even the best statement of beliefs must be regarded as tentative. Instead of this, we find that by a majority vote of not very learned or impartial men, in a semi-barbarous age, a dogma is fastened round the neck of future ages of progress and enlightenment. It is

then regarded as heresy to attempt to amend the creed; which, though it may be called the "subordinate standard," becomes virtually the only, and infallible standard and authority. But this is not the whole of the mischief. Every charitable person who endows a church holding such or such a creed is making creed-revision more and more impossible. It is a well-known fact that trust-deeds have more than once tied the hands of reformers. The celebrated case of the Free Church of Scotland is a case in point. There, the whole body of the church, almost (1100 churches out of 1128), voted to join with a sister church, the United Presbyterian, holding the same creed; but the minority of 28 held out on some small points of church government, and eventually got a decision in its favor by the House of Lords. The result was world-wide consternation, for if the highest legal authority in England was right, the effects would be very far-reaching. It required a special Act of Parliament to settle matters on any sort of logical basis, and even then, so it is reported,

the 28 ministers and churches of the minority got all they could reasonably use of the total property, which had amounted to many millions, in colleges, schools, etc. in Scotland, India, and elsewhere. May be there was some working of Karma in this for the action of the Madras people to H. P. Blavatsky in 1884.

With the best of motives those endowing creeds, and the like, may be doing much mischief to posterity. And it is difficult to know how to improve matters permanently in this respect. For, it is clearly a good thing to assist with money, or the like, a form of teaching which a man believes to be true. In connexion with this the general law should be kept in mind, the more particular the creed, the less is its extension. The shorter and more general the creed, then the greater its extension, or the greater number of minds that can accept it. But the radical difficulty arises out of the nature of the lower mind itself. It should be possible for men to unite on a *love of what is good and true*, rather than on the basis that they will all agree as to

certain dogmas. As a step to this, the creeds should be laid on the shelf — and kept there — as historical documents; interesting relics of an out-lived past, along with the thumb-screws and other mementoes of "the good old times." Religion should be a healer and unifier, but dogmatic religion has been a prolific source of strife in all lands, and in all ages. And often, the smaller the points of dispute, the more fiercely has the war of sects raged.

In this age, the Ancient Wisdom-Religion, Theosophy, comes to point the disputants to the source, the one source, from which religions and philosophies as well as races and nations have sprung. The dogmatic teachings have obscured and perverted the truth, and produced lack of unity and then strife, among men who should be living together as brethren. At first, many do not like this. Each person and each sect claims a higher position than others. The very name of Comparative Religion has been hateful to narrow-minded people. Nevertheless, the process of light-bring-

ing goes on, and even those churches which are the last to progress have advanced a little; though, if one may judge by the public utterances of some, the tendency is to go backward rather than forward. A recent telegram states that the Professor of a celebrated British University declared that the cure for the present unrest in religious matters would be a return to Calvinism! Many have not advanced much from that position, therefore the return would not be a long journey.

X

THE SEAT OF AUTHORITY

THERE are two other dogmas which deserve mention — the plenary inspiration of the Bible, and Papal infallibility — though neither can be said to spring from the Ancient Wisdom-Religion.

As to the dogma of Papal Infallibility, while it does not directly concern any church except the Roman, yet we find in other denominations something of the same tendency to make someone, or something, a standard by which to measure right and wrong. It is an infallible book, or an infallible creed, if not an infallible pope. The absurdity of regarding any person as infallible, even when speaking *ex cathedra*, is too evident, even from the history of the Roman church itself, to deserve serious attention. It finds its reason of existence only from the fact that very many people wish some one

else to think for them, on religious matters at any rate. But, however useful external helps may be, the primary authority is the conscience, the voice of the God within; as Dr. Martineau has clearly shown in his well-known work, *The Seat of Authority in Religion*. Indeed the most servile worshiper of external authority must, at least once in his life, exercise the privilege of judgment, when he abdicates to another his own right to judge in matters of religion. The true cure for this folly is to understand the real nature of man, as made known in Theosophy, and to respond to the voice of the Christos within — that voice which comes from the inner shrine of the human soul. The same applies to a book supposed to be infallible. The different parts composing this book had, at one time or other, to be examined and judged by men no better than ourselves, as to whether or not they should be made part of the canon of scripture. The judgment, the conscience, had to be used to decide in the first instance what writings should be regarded as the Bible.

Sometimes one book was rejected, sometimes another was rejected. And as Reuss has shown in his history of the Canon, its formation has been the result of a gradual growth, and not accomplished in a little while, as many suppose.

Then, as to the question of inspiration, while it is a self-evident fact that certain scriptures carry with them the evidence of a lofty source, it is quite a different thing to declare that all the words of the Old and New Testaments are God-inspired. This is the doctrine of plenary inspiration — an infallible book — and it is based specially on II Timothy, iii, 16, “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” etc. The Revised Version more correctly renders it, “every scripture inspired of God is also profitable,” etc., which conveys a very different meaning from that commonly given to it.

The question of “what is Inspiration?” cannot be discussed here; but the general principle may be noted, that every channel through which light comes has a modifying

influence on it. This is true in the spiritual as it is in the material world. Human thought, human language, individual peculiarities — all these stamp themselves on any message, even if given from the highest source. Then, as to the transmission of this scripture, all we can venture is to hope and believe that it is substantially as first given. Absolute infallibility cannot be entertained for a moment. And, after all, what better criterion can we apply to a writing than that it has met human needs and stood the test of time, that it has become a great classic? The more human the scripture is, the more it is divine. Jesus appealed to his hearers to accept or reject his words on the ground of their inherent truth. We cannot improve on that.

There are other dogmas, such as that of the resurrection of the physical body; the second Advent; the Last Judgment, which are but partial and therefore imperfect conceptions of certain truths, and as such do not occupy the place they once held. Here we are in the tomb of the flesh; at death we drop from us this

mortal body, as we put off a garment, and rise into a higher state of existence. This is shown very graphically in an ancient Egyptian picture. Neith, the Divine Mother, is the firmament. The physical body, colored red falls to the ground, but the real man, colored blue, rises up towards heaven. It reminds one of St. Paul where he speaks of the natural body being sown, the spiritual body being raised, in 1 Cor. xv. The only sense in which we can be said to have a physical resurrection is through Reincarnation. We do stand again on earth in a physical body; and it may have been from this truth that the notion of a bodily resurrection sprang into existence.

H. P. Blavatsky tells us (*The Secret Doctrine*, vol. ii. p. 459) that the *sarcophagus* or tomb in the shrine of the temple was regarded with the greatest veneration. It was "the symbol of *resurrection* cosmic, solar (or diurnal), and human." The sun was the great symbol of this in heaven, man was the symbol on earth. The materialization of this esoteric

teaching well illustrates the change from the Crypt or Adytum to the Pronaos.

The "Second Coming" was in the first instance a conception based on the words of Jesus, that some of the generation then living should not taste of death until the coming of the Son of Man. All through the centuries the idea has come to the surface again and again, sometimes producing very extraordinary popular delusions. But there is a real sense in which the Christos, the Christ in man, is coming with power and glory. As the Christos develops in each heart the general manifestation of the Christos in Humanity is drawing nearer, until at last "every eye shall see him." But, before this grand consummation there must be more than one Day of Judgment. Such days of sifting, or separating, come at the close of cycles. The Great Day, or the "Last Day," is when the manifested universe returns into the bosom of the Infinite — The Great Day "BE WITH US," mentioned in *The Secret Doctrine*. This part of the Wisdom-Religion has been narrowed

and materialized in the Christian ages, not only by theologians, but even by poets and painters. The *pronaos* here, more than in most other cases, has degraded the teaching of the shrine.

We have now entered upon the New Age. The Ancient Wisdom-Religion is being restored. The horizon of the human mind is being extended, and the light of the Christos is shining. A natural result must be the passing away of dogmas and creeds, and everything else that fetters intellectual growth, and all that "hinders or impedes the action of the nobler will."

The best and surest way to remove false teachings is to show how they arose. The best way to remove animosities is to demonstrate that we are many members in one body, that we have had a common origin, and always have a common interest. This is the mission and aim of the Wisdom-Religion.

It has been the natural tendency of dogma to produce strife in the human family. It has often been the policy, even of those called

Christians, to divide men and nations from each other, so as to rule them more easily. It is time for all this to cease. The command has come to us as it came to Moses: "Speak unto the Children of Israel, **THAT THEY GO FORWARD.**" The bondage of dogmas, the slavery of creeds, and all the darkness of medieval theology we must leave behind us. A more glorious Land of Promise than ever poet dreamed of beckons us onward. The Ancient Wisdom, and the Ancient Teachers are here again. Man is awakening to the consciousness that he is divine, and he hears a divine voice within him — a voice from the Holy of Holies — say: "Arise, shine, for thy Light is come!"

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